

The CNC Shop With Tom Morin

You can't always get what you want...

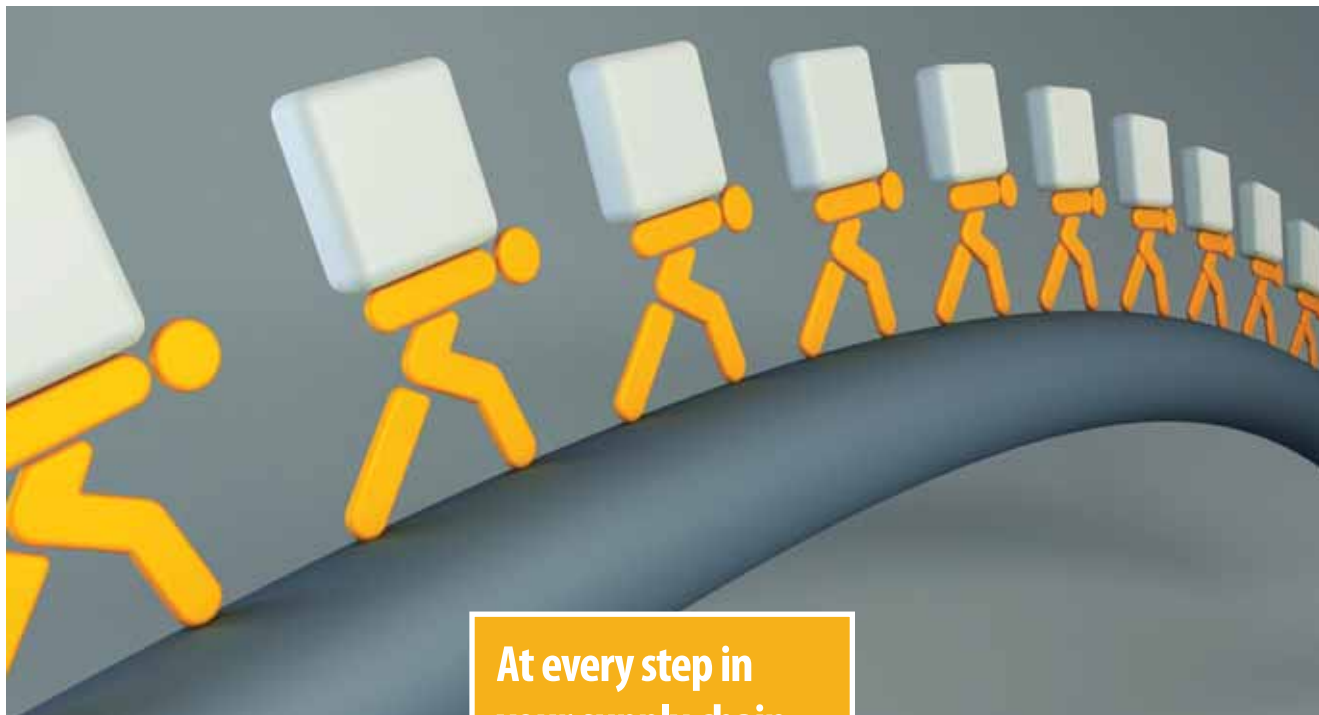


I've been having trouble with suppliers. It seems like nothing ever comes in the way it was ordered. If the product is not too big, it's too small, too wet, wrong quantity, wrong price, dented, rough, late... the list of supply snags is long. The problems can be endless — especially the first time a new product is ordered.

There is often a lot of moaning about how customer service was better in the old days. That may very well be the case, but complaining doesn't solve the issue.

When I look at supply problems, I see that the same ones are occurring every day inside my own shop. Parts arrive at a given station to be processed but are imperfect in some way — they are scratched, the wrong size, incorrectly machined and so forth.

I like to use the analogy of a *supply chain* when thinking about these problems. Manufactured goods are the result of a long series of links that bring its components together. Each link adds value to the product. If any single link in the chain is broken or weak, the product will



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be sub-standard, and possibly rejected by the customer.

This chain includes every step from the raw materials being harvested to the finished product being installed. Along the way there can be hundreds of transactions or links.

I believe most of these supply problems can be solved in two simple steps: detailed ordering and strict receiving.

Here's what I mean. At every step in your supply chain, there must be a clear order that details exactly what is required. Once the order is filled it must be verified by a receiver, who confirms that the order was properly carried out. Receiving is the key step where problems are uncovered. All important property must be spelled out on the order so that the receiver can check for it. Doing this suddenly makes every link in your supply chain a mini quality control point.

Improving quality and cutting down on problems is dramatically improved by using strict receiving. Count and carefully check every order that arrives in your shop as soon as it arrives. Never assume that an order will come in the way it was requested.

The only way the receiver can do this job well is if they have specific information on the order to check against. For example, the order should not only spell out the quantity and size, but every property that is essential to the finished product, like moisture content, allowable defects, size tolerances and packaging. This gives

the receiver specific things to check and forces problems to reveal themselves before they become an issue.

The next step is to extend detailed ordering and strict receiving to every workstation in your plant. For example, think of a cut list as an order. If those cut parts are going to the edgebander, the edgebander operator becomes the receiver. As he processes those parts he

doesn't just worry about good edgebanding, but also ensures that the right quantity and quality of parts are being processed. This way any mistakes, or damaged parts are found as soon as possible. A scratched part is then discovered early and not when the product has reached quality control at the shipping door.

Fully implemented, detailed ordering means that each workstation in a shop has paperwork that tells them what to do with the parts that they are receiving from the previous station. The nice thing is that this system doesn't require any fancy software or slick machinery. It can be implemented with a few templates and some brainstorming.

It's a pesky fact of human nature that mistakes will never be eliminated. However, if you supply your shop floor with detailed orders and demand strict receiving you might just find you get what you need. **ww**

Tom Morin runs Morinwood Contract Millwork in Victoria BC. Tell him what you'd like to know at info@morinwood.ca.



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